

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES		
Reference: 01-06	Effective Date: October 1, 1997	Page 1 of 4
SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY		
<b>RATIONALE:</b> The purpose of this policy is to guide Division/Institution/Office practices when releasing information publicly. The intent of this policy is to insure authorized Department employees are responsive to media requests by providing accurate information in a timely manner, while adhering to Utah law regarding information classification and statutory restrictions.		

**POLICY:**

All information and records created by the Department and its Divisions/Institutions/Offices (D/I/O's) are available to the public and news media representatives provided the release of such information is not restricted by Government Records Access Management Act (GRAMA) or other statute.

X **Authorized Media Contacts**

**POLICY:**

D/I/O Directors may represent their respective agencies in any forum they choose. Each D/I/O is responsible for designating which of its employees is authorized to represent the D/I/O when speaking to the news media. Before any employee represents his/her D/I/O with the news media, he/she must:

A) Receive designation as an "Authorized Media Contact" from his/her D/I/O director *and* complete the Department Public Information Training Session. Authorized Media Contacts may represent the D/I/O before the media at any time.

*or*

B) Receive specific permission from an Authorized Media Contact to speak to the news media on a case-by-case basis.

Department media designation and training are not required when employees speak publicly, *when no news media are anticipated to be present*. D/I/O directors and other managers are encouraged to be aware of topic presented when employees representing the D/I/O are speaking publicly.

X **Protocol for Media Contacts**

**POLICY:**

It is the policy of the Department of Human Services and its D/I/O's that contacts from members of the news media are to be handled expeditiously. No initial call from a journalist should wait longer than 30 minutes without a call-back to report the status of the journalist's request.

D/I/O offices which are prone to receive contacts from members of the news media should designate a Public Information Contact (PIC) person in such offices. The PIC should complete the Department Public Information Training Session. If any person in the D/I/O receives a news media contact and is unsure how to handle the call, the journalist may be referred to the PIC to expedite the

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES		
Reference: 01-06	Effective Date: October 1, 1997	Page 2 of 4
SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY		

request. The PIC may or may not be authorized to represent the D/I/O in the news media, but is trained in proper handling of news media requests.

D/I/O's shall report the names of their respective Authorized Media Contacts and Public Information Contacts to the Department Public Information Officer.

All contacts from members of the news media should be reported to the Department Public Information Officer. The person handling the journalist's request should report the substance of the call plus any areas of concern, as soon as possible. Contacts regarding controversial or highly sensitive issues should be referred to the Public Information Officer by telephone. Routine contacts may be reported via e-mail.

X Procedures for handling news media calls

- 1) Note the time of the call. Find out all the information the journalist needs. Explain that you may not have the answers, but you can find someone to answer the questions.
- 2) Ask if the journalist has a deadline for the information.
- 3) Refer the request to an Authorized Media Contact or Public Information Contact who could best handle the journalist's needs and make a return call within 30 minutes. *If none of these persons is available, contact the Department Public Information Officer at 538-3991 or 538-4001.*

Special cases

When a journalist requests a contact (i.e., interview, photograph, etc.) with a person in the custody of any DHS D/I/O, and that person is either a minor or an individual incompetent to represent him/herself, the request must be referred to the office of the D/I/O director and processed per D/I/O policy, or referred to the Department Public Information Officer.

X Initiating Press Releases and News Media Events

POLICY:

D/I/O's should issue press releases, interviews, and other news media contacts within their stewardship of geography, authority, and responsibility. The Department Public Information Officer should be apprised of all initiated news media contacts.

Practice:

Agency offices located in St. George, for example, usually should not solicit news coverage from the Salt Lake Tribune when the issue or event affects only persons in Washington County. Likewise, the Department or other state offices should usually avoid faxing press releases to all media statewide when the issue is one primarily of concern to the Wasatch Front.

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES		
Reference: 01-06	Effective Date: October 1, 1997	Page 3 of 4
SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY		

X Involving the Governor in Media Events

POLICY:

The Governor's Office has asked that all requests for the Governor's time in news media events be coordinated through public information officers of each department. All requests within the Department of Human Services and its D/I/O's for the Governor's involvement in media events shall be referred to a D/I/O Director who will coordinate the request with the Department Public Information Officer.

X Free Speech Policy

POLICY:

No policy or practice of the Department of Human Services shall be construed as to limit the personal free expressions of any employee. Employees may speak freely within or outside their occupations. When employees speak to members of the news media or to a public body in any context where the employee will be *perceived* to represent his/her D/I/O or the State of Utah, the employee must conform to Department Public Information Policies.

When an employee is off duty and outside Department property, he/she may speak on any matter, so far as his/her expressions do not divulge information protected by statute or restricted by classification. If an employee chooses to express opinions to the news media or in any public manner, but the employee is not authorized to represent the Department or any of its D/I/O's, the employee is free to do so on his/her own time and outside Department property. If any context of the employee's expressions may be construed by others to represent the position of his/her D/I/O, the Department, or the State (when the employee is unauthorized to do so), the employee must clearly disavow his/her opinions from the D/I/O while speaking in that context.

X When and how to use GRAMA

POLICY:

The Department, its agencies, and employees shall review information for possible statutory restrictions or classifications under the Utah Government Records Access and Management Act (GRAMA) before such information is released publicly. Information which is not restricted by statute or GRAMA classification may be released to any public or news media requestor without further review or official GRAMA request.

Requests for information which is subject to restriction by statute or GRAMA classification shall be referred to a designated GRAMA Officer of the D/I/O or Department. The GRAMA Officer shall process such requests in accordance with Utah Code Annotated Chapter 63 Title 2.

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES		
Reference: 01-06	Effective Date: October 1, 1997	Page 4 of 4
SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY		

X Internet Publishing

POLICY:

The Internet should be regarded as any other public medium. Agencies are encouraged to place all public information or services on their respective Internet sites, as feasible. Information should always be checked for accuracy and any restrictions (as dictated by statute or GRAMA classification) before it is published on the Internet.

The Department Public Information Committee is the Department's Internet publishing oversight body. Any substantial changes to content or form of Department Web pages will be approved by the PIC Committee. Agencies will oversee the content and form of their own Web sites.

Each D/I/O shall designate individuals who are authorized to provide or change D/I/O information published on the Internet. The Department Public Information Officer will maintain a directory of D/I/O-authorized Web publishers. The Department Webmaster may accept additions and changes to Department and D/I/O Web pages only from persons so authorized.

A private corporation, business, provider or other commercial entity, whether or not operating for profit, may not have its information published on an Internet site within the domains of the Department or its agencies. The Department or its agencies may post "links" to other Internet sites belonging to commercial and non-commercial entities. Such links must have a useful public purpose which supports the mission of the Department or its agencies. If a D/I/O posts a link to any such entity, it must allow the posting of all other links to entities which meet these criteria.

*Robin Arnold-Williams*

DATE 10-1-97

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Department of Human Services